



Governor Terry E. Branstad  
Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds  
San Wong, Director

## **Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans**

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2015

Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families  
800 University Avenue, Room 129  
Des Moines, Iowa 50314

**Call to order** at 1:45 pm by Chairperson Clair Rudison

### **Welcome/Introductions:**

**Present:** Clair Rudison, Rita Davenport (conference call), Madai Taylor (conference call), Bryan Burton (conference call), Ken Morris (conference call), Lynn Sutton (conference call)

**Absent:** San Wong, Ex-officio, Kimberly Wayne

**Staff:** Kim Cheeks, Alba Perez, Monica Stone

### **Visitors:**

Charles (Chuck) Palmer, Director, Iowa Department of Human Services

Wendy Rickman, Iowa Department of Human Services

Ross Wilburn, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension

Glendda Bivens, ISU Extension

Der Vang, ISU Student

Ryan Saddler, St Ambrose University, Quad Cities Empowerment

Dana Boone, Epiphany365

Arnold Woods, Des Moines Branch NAACP

Carla Dawson, Children and Family Urban Movement

Brian Morelli, Cedar Rapids Gazette

Doyle Landry – Positive Vision

Victor Propes – Community member and a Buffalo Soldier

### **Approve Minutes:**

Commissioner Taylor motioned to approve minutes of May 15, 2015 meeting as written, Commissioner Davenport second, approved unanimously.

### **Financial Report:**

Stone reported the budget for Status of African-Americans pretty much covers staff salaries. She further stated that when the department was reorganized, all the CAS office budgets were combined into one.

**Division of Community Advocacy and Services**

A thing to note, the budget is appropriated (approx. 1 million) for the entire division not just one office. She suggested think about in terms of division/office.

Question: How are funds allocated for each office?

Response: Stone, each office has roughly the same amount of budget.

Question: How much would be ideal for the division?

Response: Stone, they (division administrators and director) put together a status quo budget each year. She guided attendees to look at the minimal travel budget, and pointed out most is for commission travel to meetings, but the offices/division are supposed to cover the entire state. An area of focus could be to increase travel budget.

Question: Is any consideration in making meetings mobile?

Response: Stone, again they have to look at travel funds available, and look at live streaming, but face to face is the most effective.

**Public Comment:**

Arnold Woods, Des Moines Branch NAACP – since the budget is small does it leave room for professional development, to attend national meetings?

Chair Rudison replied - he experienced it last year, when the National Coalition of African American Commissions wanted to meet at the Congressional Black Caucus, but there were no funds to cover travel to the event.

Comment – so Iowa was not represented? How can the state address that? Stone stated there is no budget for travel this fiscal year. The budget has no room for increases in costs of living (insurance, salary increases, etc.). The budget is determined by the legislature. She suggested determine specific items to advocate for, and develop a strategy to present at next legislative session.

State Rep. Ruth Ann Gaines, believes there is a misunderstanding to the legislators that there is no need for an increase in funding for the Department of Human Rights. She believes that there was a question, in an appropriations meeting, to the director of how much money was needed, and the director responded the department didn't need any more funds.

Commissioner Taylor, commented that he believes that if the commission is going to be more effective, we need more money. Lack of money makes it difficult to connect with other counties on what is needed to address the issues because there are no resources. He could put together a plan if we had the financial resources. He has heard we need money since he's been a commissioner.

Perez, clarified, there has been no funding for professional development, most of the budget goes to salaries. One item described in the code is the ability to recommend suggestions to the

governor/legislature, she suggested look at the public policy priorities. Stone mentioned the department has a legislative liaison.

Landry stated in the May 15, 2015 minutes, the same conversation took place. He questioned if director Wong was coming to the meeting? Stone explained there were four commission meetings scheduled that day and she was covering this meeting. Landry voiced his concern as to why is it so difficult for the director to show up at meeting for this particular commission.

Rep. Gaines indicated she made a prolific presentation in reference to the budget for SAA and DHR, there were 43 persons present and she was the only one articulating the needs for the budget to be increased.

Stone, stated she was involved in presenting the budget to the legislature and director Wong didn't indicate the department didn't need additional funding, there must have been a miscommunication and she is glad it has been pointed out so that it may be resolved.

Landry, noted the NAACP and the commission collaborate on a session to train people how to advocate. Woods clarified the NAACP did hold a session this year. Several organizations were involved. Perez offered there is a booklet online about who the legislators are and how to contact them. Woods said a lobbyist does the training.

Commissioner Taylor feels the Governor's office does not see our issues as a priority and doesn't think they ever will, because we don't have a collective voice. He feels there should be an agenda put together for low-income and minority individuals. Our communities need for a political voice. He questioned at the last meeting the Director was in attendance and was noted in the minutes.

Landry informed on October 8<sup>th</sup>, the Des Moines register is holding a forum at the downtown office on use of body cameras, and you don't have to be a journalist to attend. He asked when the commission sets date for the next meeting, to request director Wong be present for questions of concern, specifically for fiscal year 2017 budget.

### ***Reports:***

#### **1. Director:**

In Director Wong's absence, Stone reported that she began a new position of administrator of Community Advocacy and Services (CAS) division. During her supervision; one thing she is planning to do is connect the work of the commission to the work of the department, which is not new. There are 10 in the CAS division, with 120 commissioners throughout the state. Ms. Stone feels the division should support the commissioners and assist in carrying out the mission & vision of the department. She will reach out to commissions, most likely the chairs of each, to find out how the divisions can help them and how they can help department. Moving forward, CAS will operate with a more strategic agenda. In December 2014, Stone was hired as the assistant to the director, and in July 2015 she was promoted to the deputy

director/administrator of the CAS division. Previously, she worked for the State of Iowa for 24 years in the area of environmental and renewable energy. The assistant to the director position, her former position, has been posted and closes today.

**Question:** How does the director take appointments? Because they feel that she views us as inferior and that our issues are being ignored. Her absence sends the wrong message on inclusion. Especially, when you look at what is happening around the world when it comes to African Americans.

**Response:** Stone said she is willing to work with those who wish to meet with the director. Her information is available on the website, via email [monica.stone@iowa.gov](mailto:monica.stone@iowa.gov), or mobile phone at 515-314-4747.

#### **Office / Commissioner Reports:**

Chair requested that to expedite time, he motioned to move to the next agenda item. The office report has been provided and he reminded commissioners to forward their written reports to Cheeks. Taylor seconded the motion, approved unanimously.

#### **Old Business:**

##### **1. DHR Board Report:**

Rudison reported; he reviewed the new website, examined report on disproportionate minority contact, and saw Iowa was at the top of the list for African American confinement. He emphasized the Legislative Services Agency update reporting the estimated total expense of the new correctional facility in Fort Madison, in excess of 168.6 million.

##### **2. DHR Website**

Monica urged each person to visit the new department website and offer any improvements or feedback.

#### **New business:**

##### **1. Department of Human Services (DHS) – Director Charles Palmer**

Child welfare – Director Palmer discussed the initiatives being offered in DHS and how could the members of the commission and attendees work together with DHS to effectively create an agenda to address the disproportionality of African Americans youth in the child welfare system. He explained he has been assigned to do Legislative Interim Committees and asked the commission to provide a pool of names to serve on the groups. He asked that they report back to the commission on how they are addressing disproportionality across the state. A Mental Health Interim Committee on children's mental health is in the process of identifying members to serve on the committee as well. He is aware of the stigma that exists in the African American

community about mental health. Identify a designee to talk about the needs of the child and families that have these issues. Many feel the African American is not thought about or left out. It would spread the influence and engagement. He noted he has been successful in reports not going on the shelf. Dir. Palmer suggested the committee that is ready to work and efforts will come to the floor of the legislature. Felt the commission could focus advocacy efforts on issues affecting disproportionality and services responsive to the needs of the community. The commission assist by identifying 2-3 issues that DHS should be responding or sensitive to, what they are, and how to work together to address the issues. Examples include training, outreach to staff, special programs, etc. He offered, in order for the commission to get more money, they should have a plan, get a champion, and have a track record.

Wendy Rickman, division administrator for policy added, child welfare started in 2006, with field staff in five different service areas. Each has team that works on child welfare and disproportionality. There are local programs that are happening that the commission and community can participate. She will update the commission on efforts and who to contact locally. Perez found helpful the staff reports in areas that have been provided on Latino children, and they available on-line. Ms. Rickman will provide a report on youth of color and how they fare in the system. County data isn't available, because in some counties the youth may be the only in the county, and the confidentiality could be compromised.

Landry commented, in Aug. 1, 2014, in a conversation with Rep. Gaines, she had nice things to say about Dir. Palmer. He is interested in providing a mental health conference, examining the mental health of youth and how it's addressed in the public school system. Thanked Dir. Palmer for his transparency and shared hope for work on African American mental health.

Palmer again, offered the opportunity for the commission to provide a representative to sit on the committee for mental health for African American children.

## **2. Statewide Economic Empowerment**

Rudison, met with Governor Branstad where he referenced a report stating Iowa the worst in number of African American businesses. He expressed the need to put together a statewide economic empowerment plan with Dr. Keith Johnson, an Iowa City native, who has a dual PHD. To review the plan points – refer to his commissioner report.

## **3. National Coalition State African American Commission letter**

Motion by Taylor that ICSAA support the national coalition letter and send out to governor, legislators, and community, second by Morris, approved unanimously.

**Next meeting:**

Chair Rudison will work with Cheeks on a date for the next meeting.

**Adjourn at 3:30 pm.**

Move to adjourn by Taylor, second by Rudison, approved unanimously.